

# Radical Self-Care

Bring yourself back into balance  
with sacred healing

By Kristin Vuković



Deborah Hanekamp, aka Mama Medicine, a NYC-based healer



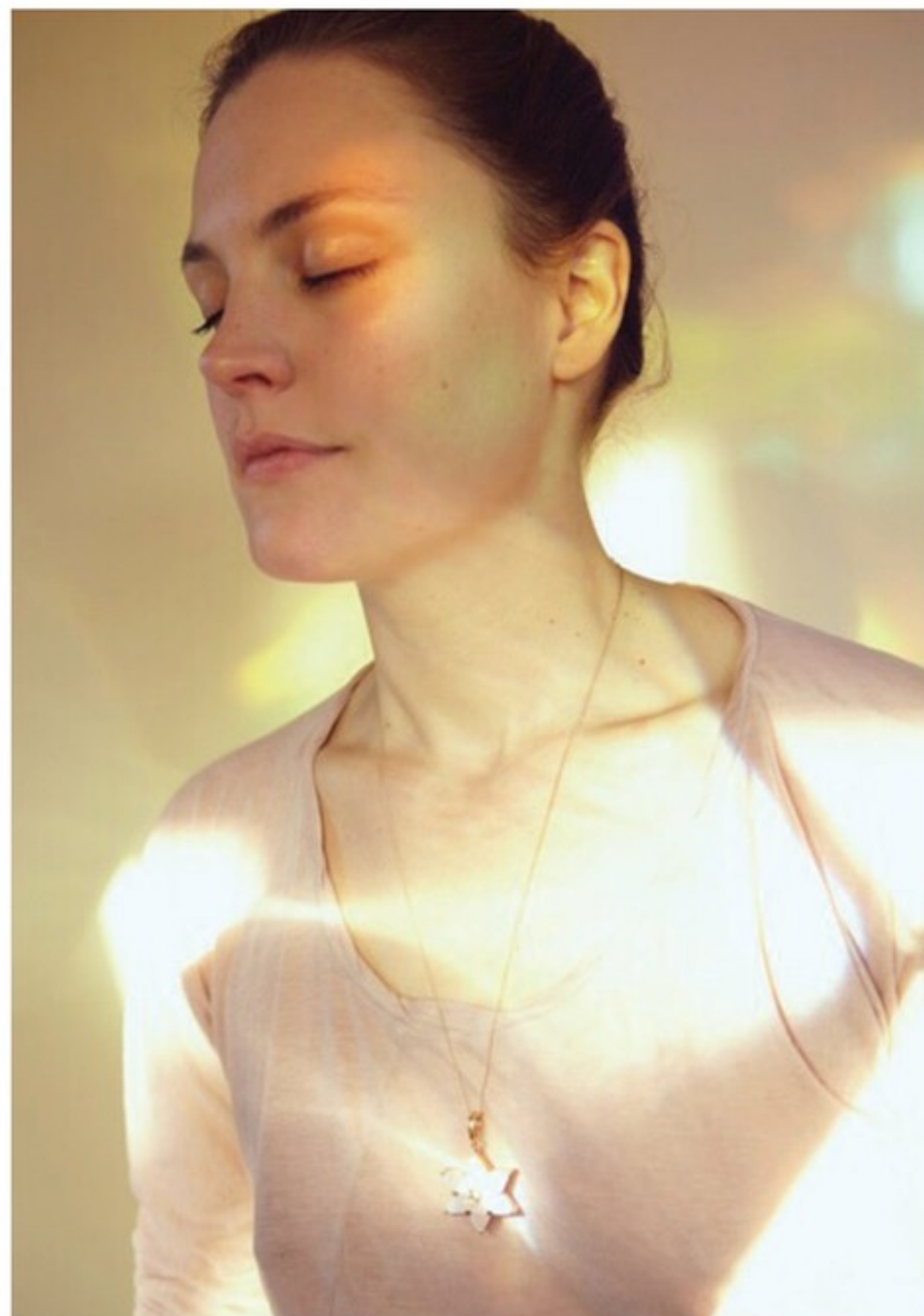
On a brisk fall day in New York City, I stretched out a blanket on an expanse of grass near the Hudson River and lay there with my eyes closed, taking in the city's panoply of sounds: birds chirping, jackhammers humming, children playing. Ssanyu, a bone healer shaman, told me to set an intention and hovered her hands over various parts of my body. A word emerged: release. After the session, she relayed the stories contained in my bones: My abdomen told her about my C-section, my knees told her about being bullied, the arches of my feet told her about feeling unsupported and my jaw held back things I needed to say and express. I was floored; at our first encounter, Ssanyu knew more about me than some of my friends.

Ssanyu holds an MS in Narrative Medicine from Columbia University and juggles many roles, including adjunct professor at Columbia University, where she teaches in the Master's Program in Narrative Medicine. She hails from a lineage of bone healers. Her father was chief of their Buganda clan in Uganda, and she felt the healing power in her hands at an early age. Her mother was her first guide, who attuned her to Reiki. She sees herself as an educator, healer and facilitator who strives to preserve ancestral wisdoms, traditions and spiritual practices.

Ssanyu believes we all inherently know how to heal ourselves, but, sometimes, we need a little help to move things along. "It's about learning how to write our own prescriptions," she says. Sharing our stories is crucial to our ability to self-heal. Story is our connection to Spirit; these stories live in the bones. Ssanyu sees moments in time, moments of past experience. "They come in like flashes and embodied feelings," she says. "We need to connect to Spirit to help us heal these wounds." Moving through the space of letting go leads to forgiveness, where we can let go of the things that no longer serve us.

Radical self-care is about balancing the system and bringing yourself into alignment, and there are many modalities to explore. I reached out to Deborah Hanekamp, aka Mama Medicine, a NYC-based healer who apprenticed in the Peruvian Amazon within what is called Mestizo Shamanism. Her intention is to create a space where you feel welcome, seen, loved and inspired. We connected on a Zoom call without video because she found she has been able to go deeper with the video off.

"This is really all about you being your own healer," Hanekamp says. "You will bring forward anything and everything you're looking forward to call in or clear out in life, and I'll read your aura. Based on what you said and what I see coming up in your aura, we'll have a whole conversation that helps click things into place and gets some clarity and perspective on different things in life. Toward the end, we'll do a healing ceremony and I'll send you on your way with some homework."



Chloe Isidora, a UK-based fashion editor-turned-healer





Ssanyu, a bone healer shaman from Uganda and adjunct professor at Columbia University

After relaxing into my body and taking a few deep breaths, Hanekamp saw a lot of green (creativity/nurturing/empathy) and blue (communication/communicating dreams) in my aura. “Blue has always been within you, but right now is just now starting to get the opportunity to come forward. We have to give your daughter a lot of credit with that energy coming through. I think she has woken this up in you—the ability to trust in what you create, to believe in what you create.” She added that my self-care practices should center around growing that confidence, trust and faith in myself. She recommended a bath with Epsom salts, a grounding essential oil such as vetiver and oak leaves.

To learn more about self-care practices, I connected via Zoom with Chloe Isidora, a fashion editor-turned-healer based in the UK. Through travels to Peru, Chile, Thailand, India and America’s coasts, she gleaned aspects of shamanism, crystalline consciousness and herbalism. In her book, *Sacred Self-care: Everyday rituals for a more joyful and meaningful life* (Octopus Publishing, 2019), she illustrates how rituals and ceremonies can nourish our bodies and spirits.

“For me, sacred self-care is about giving the most exquisite, impeccable love and care that you possibly can to yourself,” she writes. “It’s about bringing yourself from your mind into your body to feel what’s there and to nurture yourself tenderly.” Isidora advises doing the things you really like—for example, stretching, sighing, dancing, self-massage—all the ways you can physically bring yourself inward. She strives to create a cleansed, clear space to connect. “It’s really about allowing the energy to do the work,” she says. “For me, to empower is to hold up space so that another can meet her own self and receive guidance from deep within.”

To round out my healing journey, I headed to Naturopathica, where I indulged in a Chill Massage, which relieves mental and physical stress through a deeply relaxing, customized massage featuring Naturopathica Chill Full Spectrum CBD & Kava Balm, an endocannabinoid-activating full-spectrum CBD, kava and ginger balm with organically cultivated USA-grown hemp flowers. A new add-on, the Vie Meditation treatment provided an extra layer of relaxation—especially when paired with foot reflexology. Listening to the guided recording over a background of waves, I felt myself melt into the table and go deeper within, the noise and stress of New York City’s streets dissipating.

“As we opened back up we really wanted to meet our clients where they are [to] help them discover the wellness practice that works best for them—a really truly sustainable practice,” says Emma Froelich-Shea, president of Naturopathica. And that’s really what radical self-care is all about: identifying your individual toolkit of wellness options, and discovering our innate ability to heal ourselves.